

New York State Inebriate Asylum
425 Robinson Street
Binghamton
Broome County
New York

HABS No. NY-5588

HABS
NY,
4-BING,
5-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

NEW YORK STATE INEBRIATE ASYLUM

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NY,
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Location: 425 Robinson Street, Binghamton, Broome County,
New York

Present Owner: New York State Department of Mental Hygiene

Present Occupant: Binghamton State Hospital

Present Use: The building now houses the administrative offices
of the hospital.

Statement of
Significance: Founded by Dr. Jonathan Edward Turner in 1854, it
was probably the first inebriate asylum in the
world. Today, it stands as a major surviving
example of an institution built in the castellated
Gothic Revival style.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: It was originally chartered on April 15, 1854 as the privately funded United States Inebriate Asylum. An amended charter of 1857 changed its name to the New York State Inebriate Asylum. Its picturesque 250-acre site some 240 feet above the Susquehanna River was donated by the City of Binghamton. After administrative, political, financial and construction difficulties, it was closed in 1867 and ceded to the State for \$1.00. Then, in 1879, the building and grounds were reopened as the New York State Asylum for the Chronic Insane. (Lawyer, p. 293; Turner, p. vii.)
2. Date of erection: Foundations were begun on June 17, 1858. Masonry work was commenced a month later. The cornerstone was laid on September 24, 1858. The building housed its first patient in 1864. (Lawyer, p. 292; Turner, p. 13.)
3. Architect: Isaac G. Perry (Turner, p. viii), possibly assisted by Peter B. Wight (Hitchcock, p. 189). Additionally, Thaddeus A. Kingsley was the Head Carpenter, c. 1862-67 (Turner, p. 298).
4. Builder, suppliers, etc.: Contractors unknown. Original cost of the building to September 1, 1866 was \$233,169.65. This was deferred through individual sub-

scriptions and donations in kind (Turner, pp. 277-78). The facade's exterior is of Syracuse (Onondaga) limestone while interior walls are brick.

5. Original plans and construction: Location of the original plans remains unknown. However, sources for the facade's elevation may include crenelated collegiate structures in the Gothic Revival style such as A. J. Davis' New York University Building (1837) or his Virginia Military Institute (1840's) (Newton, pp. 29, 290-291; Early, p. 95). Additionally, Gothic Revival prison architecture such as Blackwell's Island Penitentiary (c. 1853) may also have influenced this asylum's facade (Gillon, p. 159, fig. 435). Gothic style was appropriate for this type of asylum since medieval civilization, according to Turner, was the only one not afflicted by inebriety (Turner, pp. 24-26).
6. Alterations and additions: Several fires damaged the building in 1863, 1864 and 1869. The 1864 fire destroyed the north wing of the asylum causing \$81,000 worth of damage (Lawyer, p. 293; Turner, p. 271). This was supposedly in ruins until and even past 1867 (Turner, p. 274). Additionally, the 1869 fire destroyed the rear buildings. When the state received the building in 1870, Isaac G. Perry was the architect entrusted with making alterations and possibly restoring damaged parts from previous fires. Contracts for this amounted to the sum of \$10,056 (Seward, p. 236). At some point in its history, the rose window above the central entrance was replaced by a four-centered arch. Additionally, the crenelations on all the turrets were recently removed.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

An elaborate cornerstone laying ceremony was attended by numerous well known personages (reprinted in Turner, p. 83ff).

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views:

New York State Inebriate Asylum, engraving by Lossing and Barritt, New York; n.d. Cites Isaac G. Perry as the architect. This is the one most frequently used as the basis for other views of the asylum in book illustrations, advertisements and cover illustrations for Trustees' Reports. See Turner, frontispiece.

Destruction of the New York State Inebriate Asylum, at Binghamton by Fire, Sept. 16, engraving after a sketch by E. G. Rowe depicting the fire of 1864. (Possibly engraved by A. B. Tubbs.) See Putnam, vol. 32 for this illustration.

New York State Inebriate Asylum, undated photograph in vol. 32 of the Putnam Collection, NW view.

Binghamton State Hospital, photograph of the facade published in 1905. See Binghamton Daily Republican, p. 15.

New York State Inebriate Asylum, bird's-eye view engraving published in 1876. See Everts, et al, pp. 18-19.

2. Bibliography:

Binghamton Daily Republican. Illustrated Binghamton and Vicinity. Binghamton, 1905, p. 15.

Everts, Ensign and Everts. Combination Atlas Map of Broome County. Philadelphia, 1876; reprinted 1973, pp. 17-20.

*Early, James. Romanticism and American Architecture. New York and London, 1965.

*Gillon, Edmund V., Jr. Early Illustrations and Views of American Architecture. New York, 1971.

Hitchcock, Henry Russell. "Ruskin and American Architecture, or Regeneration Long Delayed," in Concerning Architecture. ed. John Sumerson. London, 1968, pp. 166-208 (189 n.1).

Lawyer, William. Binghamton, its Settlement, Growth and Development (1800-1900). Boston, 1900, Chapter XV, pp. 291ff-'Inebriate Asylum'; pp. 916-17-'Isaac G. Perry'.

*Newton, Roger Hale. Town and Davis, Architects. Pioneers in American Revival Architecture, 1812-1870. New York, 1942.

Page, H. R., publisher. Binghamton Illustrated. Publication place unlisted, 1890.

Putnam, Frederick Wallace. Inebriate Asylum, vol. 32 of A Documentary History of Broome County. Binghamton, 1926. A collection of addresses, ceremonies and reports from the Trustees and Directors of the

Asylum. Also contains various illustrations and newspaper clippings on the building.

Seward, William F. Binghamton and Broome County, New York: A History. New York and Chicago, 1924.

Turner, Jonathan Edwards. The History of the First Inebriate Asylum in the World. New York, 1888. For a description of the Asylum's facilities and dimensions before it was built, see pp. viii-ix.

Wilkinson, J. B. The Annals of Binghamton. Binghamton, 1872. For a physical description of the Asylum and its measurements in 1872, see Appendix, pp. 224-25.

*These references do not mention the Inebriate Asylum. They are cited here in relation to the Asylum's possible source.

D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

1. Mr. Goodman, Librarian for the Binghamton State Hospital. (Tel. 724-3491, Ext. 450; weekdays 10-12, 1-3.)
2. Librarian for Gannet Newspapers, Vestal Parkway, Binghamton, New York.

Prepared by John R. Zukowsky
Graduate Student in Art and
Architectural History
State University of New York
at Binghamton
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PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of the documentation of structures in the Southern Tier of New York State, undertaken by HABS in cooperation with the Broome County Historical Society and the Valley Development Foundation, Inc.

The project was under the general supervision of John Poppeliers, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. The historical material was prepared in May, 1974, by John R. Zukowsky, then a graduate student in art and architectural history at the State University of New York at Binghamton. The project was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Constance Werner Ramirez, June, 1974.